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Report on the living conditions of indigenous children and adolescents in Mesoamerica and compliance with their rights

Note by the Secretariat

In accordance with the decision taken by the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues at its tenth session (see E/2011/43, paragraph 77), the Forum decided to appoint Álvaro Pop and Myrna Cunningham to prepare a report on the situation of indigenous children in Latin America and the Caribbean. [1]

* E/C.19/2014/1.

[1] Subsequently, the Forum members decided to prepare a report on the living conditions of indigenous children and adolescents in Mesoamerica and compliance with their rights. The Forum members would like to thank Zully Morales for her support in the preparation of the report.

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Report on the living conditions of indigenous children and adolescents in Mesoamerica and compliance with their rights

I. Presentation

1. The main findings of the independent expert Álvaro Pop in relation to the living conditions of indigenous children and adolescents in Mesoamerica and compliance with their rights are summarized below.

2. One of the findings is a factor that is common to all countries: in addition to lagging behind all other groups in terms of social development indicators, the indigenous population receives the smallest share of public expenditure in each country where a specific budget line exists. In Mexico, for example, the general indigenous population receives 9.34 per cent of all public expenditure. Strictly speaking, it could be argued that this figure is too low, because it refers to a direct allocation. Guatemala, in contrast, has a food aid programme to reduce the chronic malnutrition rate, but no record of how much of that aid, entitled *Mi Bolsa Segura* by the current Government (2012-2015), is specifically targeted at indigenous children.

II. Similar issues and situations

3. Since Mesoamerican countries share a history of colonization and nation-building, they also have similar social conditions. The vast majority of the indigenous population, for example, lives in rural areas because in colonial times the urban areas developed around the colonizers' settlements. It is worth noting that most of these populations were displaced from their original lands and resettled to suit the colonizers' interests.

4. In general, the fact that indigenous groups gathered together in rural communities made their culture more resilient to external influences but left them at a great disadvantage compared to the rest of the population, because urban areas have without exception become the development hubs in the countries studied.

5. Another shared historical feature is the seasonal migratory flows that occur within countries and, in the case of Guatemala, from the west of the country to the south of Mexico during the coffee harvest. In these situations the whole family travels, and children and adolescents do not receive direct payment because their work is usually considered as part of the father's work.

6. Another shared factor is that the lack of opportunities for work and study in the countries of origin, particularly in rural areas, means that children and young people are victims of family disintegration when one or both parents migrate to the United States (this phenomenon occurs in both Nicaragua and Costa Rica) in search of better incomes to give their family a higher standard of living. In such cases, children stay with their mother, grandparents or aunts and uncles, which leaves them vulnerable to greater discrimination and abuse of all kinds and at risk of violence.

7. In other cases, which go largely unrecorded by States, children and adolescents migrate to the United States in order to contribute to the household economy and ensure that their parents and siblings have better opportunities. In addition to

leaving the family, they also have to face a series of dangers ranging from violence to loss of life on their way to the United States, and have no support and no protection of their rights either on the journey or in the destination country.

8. One of the consequences of migration, in particular migration to the United States, is the loss of national and ethnic identity, a phenomenon that has to be addressed because it violates the rights of children and adolescents in every sense.

9. Migrants are searching for better opportunities, but their economic and social rights are infringed without anyone paying attention; in addition to the violation of individual rights, the serious violation of collective rights is also ignored.

10. Furthermore, according to the State of the Region report on sustainable human development published in 2011 by the State of the Nation Programme of Costa Rica, Central America, in particular Guatemala and Honduras (together with El Salvador and Belize), is the most violent region of Latin America; the number women murdered has increased and, worryingly, most of these killed (both men and women) are aged between 18 and 34. It should also be noted that a number of vicious murders of girls have been committed in Guatemala. It has also been confirmed that organized criminal groups and gangs are involving and using children and adolescents in various criminal activities, including contract killings, because the law does not punish children and adolescents as harshly as adults. This phenomenon occurs mainly in the capital and in major urban centres.

11. Drug traffickers also use children to sell drugs and often pay them in drugs instead of money, thus making them addicts at an early age and keeping them tied to trafficking networks.

12. Nonetheless, both Mexico and the Central American countries studied have ratified international instruments on human rights, specifically the rights of the child and of indigenous peoples, and have produced ordinary legislation in those areas. In view of the situation of indigenous children and adolescents in those countries, however, the expected benefits of this legal framework would not yet appear to have reached indigenous communities or the population as a whole. We must therefore seek to establish the reasons why this legislation is not being applied and the rights of this population are being repeatedly violated from various quarters.

III. The situation of indigenous children and adolescents in Mexico

13. Mexico has a total population of over 110 million. According to official figures, the indigenous population makes up 10 per cent of that total.

14. Although the various Mexican indigenous peoples can be found throughout the national territory, this study begins with an examination of the issues at the national level and then focuses on the three southern States of Chiapas, Campeche, and Tabasco.

15. It is clear that indigenous children and youth are provided with fewer educational, economic and health-care opportunities than the non-indigenous population, both by the State and their families. As their parents had even less opportunities, indigenous children and youth find themselves ensnared in the same patterns of exclusion that eventually lead to poverty.

16. The national budget of each country reflects glaring inequalities in the public spending that benefits indigenous persons with the greatest need. The 10 per cent with the lowest human development index (HDI) receive only 5.7 per cent of the total public expenditure on education intended for that group. Similarly, the same group receives only 6.7 per cent of Government transfers to indigenous persons, while the 10 per cent of the indigenous population with the highest HDI receives 31.7 per cent. On the whole, according to the 2010 Human Development Report on Indigenous Peoples in Mexico prepared by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) the general indigenous population received 9.34 per cent of total federal Government spending in 2008, meaning that the non-indigenous population received about 90.7 per cent of this spending.

17. Although targeted federal spending includes a compensation scheme for the disadvantaged indigenous population, it does not guarantee increased opportunities. It is critical to generate sources of information that can more accurately assess whether the indigenous population actually benefits from the funds allocated to it.

18. There are contextual factors, such as health conditions, parents' aspirations and household socioeconomic status, that strongly influence the decision to attend school and have a direct bearing on progress in this component of development. School attendance rates among the indigenous population are lower than those of the non-indigenous population, and the difference between the rates increases after the age of 12. This indicates that indigenous youth begin to leave school after completing the primary level of education.

19. The failure to promote policies that guarantee a quality education for the different sectors of the population results in great social and economic costs. The direct consequence of an unfavourable learning environment, such as that in Mexico, and for the indigenous population in particular, is the intergenerational transmission of poverty and inequality.

20. There has been considerable progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals, and with respect to education in all three States surveyed, the governments are working to promote universal access to education and are devising programmes, projects and measures to reach different sectors of the population. However, government information and priorities rarely focus on indigenous peoples and specific groups such as children and adolescents.

21. Although gender equality is encouraged in the three States, there are no clear indicators of the impact on indigenous children and adolescents. As references to indigenous people are made in general terms, it is not possible to identify institutions providing bilingual education or specific, quantifiable actions taken by the State.

22. About 50 per cent of indigenous households without health insurance spend 30 per cent of their quarterly income on healthcare costs, which is twice the amount spent by non-indigenous households. This reduces the amount of income available for other necessities such as food, education or household goods, further decreasing the level of well-being.

23. In relation to employment, 45.9 per cent of indigenous men and 18.2 per cent of indigenous women work in the agricultural sector. The lack of education and training in other activities limits the opportunities available to the indigenous population to access high productivity employment and better working conditions.

24. The available data on education and health is too broad. For example, according to UNDP, there was a nationwide increase in the number of persons enrolled in school during the period 2000-2005, resulting in a slight increase in literacy levels among indigenous persons aged 15 years and older from 72.6 per cent to 74.3 per cent. As the data sources are not uniform, it is not possible to create profiles for southern Mexico, and even less so for each State and indigenous community with an indication of their specific circumstances.

IV. The situation of indigenous children and adolescents in Guatemala

25. Guatemala is a smaller country than Mexico and has fewer indigenous peoples (22 peoples of Mayan origin together with the Xinka and Garifuna make a total of 24), but official data indicate that 14 per cent of the population is indigenous, while other sources state that the indigenous population accounts for over 40 per cent of the total.

26. According to the 2011 National Survey of Living Conditions conducted by the National Institute of Statistics, Guatemala is a young country with 52 per cent of the population under the age of 20 years. According to the same survey, the majority of the youth population is located in the departments of Altiplano and Alta Verapaz, which also have the largest indigenous populations.

27. With regard to the national budget, direct spending on children and adolescents is still primarily handled by the Ministry of Education, which administers 90.6 per cent of the total. It is followed, in order of importance, by the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare with 4.8 per cent, while the secretariats and other offices of the executive branch administer the remaining 4.6 per cent earmarked for children. The Ministry of Social Development also has a substantial allocation, as does the Secretariat for Food Security. However, these offices do not provide a breakdown of investment; there is no data, for example, on the food aid programme, which is known by the current Government as *Mi Bolsa Segura*, or on the services for children with symptoms of chronic malnutrition to indicate how many children are indigenous or to which indigenous peoples they belong.

28. The national rate of chronic malnutrition is alarming, and has been on the political agenda (or at least part of the political discourse) of recent Governments. To address this situation, the current Government has given priority to 166 municipalities as part of the Zero Hunger Plan. However, almost one year later and despite a budget of over 5 billion quetzals, there has been little progress.

29. The Ministry of Education, through the General Directorate of Intercultural Bilingual Education, which reports to the Vice-Ministry of Intercultural Bilingual Education, keeps records of the number of children enrolling in school each year. Starting from the primary level, that number can then be compared with the number of children that pass into the next grade level. For example, according to these records, a total of 455,275 children enrolled in pre-primary education, including 268,105 from rural areas, 76,324 of whom were indigenous children.

30. In contrast, 355,785 students were enrolled in secondary school in 2011. Only 16.76 per cent of them were indigenous students and the percentage of indigenous students from urban areas far exceeded the 20.09 per cent of such students from

rural areas that had enrolled that year. A mere 9.65 per cent of the national total of 59,637 indigenous students were women from rural areas.

31. According to the preceding paragraphs, the higher the grade level, the fewer the number of students from rural areas, and the smaller the percentage of indigenous students. And there are even fewer female students, especially female indigenous students. The education system in Guatemala thus apparently favours or facilitates the education of the non-indigenous population and of those living in urban areas. It therefore follows that the current system is an exclusive one through which Guatemala condemns the rural and indigenous population to fewer job opportunities and to a future of little opportunity, while also perpetuating this system of inequality. Unless strong, decisive action is taken to change this situation, these trends will continue for a long time to come.

32. Concerning Guatemala's progress towards achieving the health-related Millennium Development Goals, it has met the target of reducing infant mortality (children under one year), is close to meeting the target for child mortality in children under age 5, but will be unable to meet the target for maternal mortality. With regard to the first indicator, the number of deaths per 1,000 live births decreased from 73 to 38 between 1987 and 2002. According to the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), the infant mortality rate was 42 deaths per 1,000 live births for the period of 2008/2009. The goal is to bring that number down to 37 by 2015.

33. On the subject of labour, the National Employment and Income Survey of 2011 reveals that the national average wage is 9 per cent less than the statutory minimum wage, and that in the private sector it is 8 per cent less. Average wages in the public sector are 59 per cent higher than the minimum wage. The salaries of the indigenous population, youth and women are, on average, 22 per cent less than the national average. Indigenous persons receive the lowest salaries in all fields.

34. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), there are 291,467 children aged between 10 and 15 years participating in the labour market. Two thirds are agricultural workers and are indigenous, and girls account for 26 per cent of that number. Their average salary is some 22 per cent of the minimum wage and is lower in trade and industry.

V. The situation of indigenous children and youth in Honduras

35. The purpose of this report is to describe the current demographic, economic and citizen security situation, in addition to health, education and employment in Honduras, from the perspective of respect for the rights of indigenous and Afro-descendant children and youth, to provide an assessment of the situation in those areas.

36. The population of Honduras was estimated at 8.2 million people in 2012, according to projections from the National Statistical Institute. The average age of Hondurans is 21 and indigenous people make up a minority of the population, 7.2 per cent of the total. The most recent data for children and youth are from 2007, when there were 2.08 million children and 3.44 million adolescents.

37. The gross domestic product (GDP) of Honduras was $15.347 billion in 2010; the per capita GDP for the same period was $2,016. That same year GDP grew by

2.8 per cent, less than in the period from 2001 to 2009, when the average growth rate was 4.1 per cent. The inflation rate in 2010 was 6.5 per cent, and the average rate for the decade was 7.5 per cent. Despite the performance of these indicators, the majority of the population has not felt the economic growth of recent years and 66.2 per cent of inhabitants live below the poverty line, with the rural population most affected by widespread poverty.

38. The general macroeconomic stability of the Honduran economy does not produce sufficient incentives to generate and attract investment in the country, which is reflected in the inadequate industrial and social infrastructure, poor job creation and low levels of productive enterprises. Among indigenous populations, the creation of and access to economic opportunities are even more limited.

39. In addition, Honduras has the worst levels of crime in Central America: its homicide rate is among the highest in Latin America; the most recent reported rate (2009) was 66.8 per 100,000 inhabitants. The high levels of crime and violence in Honduras pose an obstacle to both domestic and foreign investment, leading to unemployment. Those killed by the violence leave behind them orphans and widows and national talent is lost.

40. In terms of the national budget, no information has been found on specific budgetary line items for the indigenous population. As investment appears to benefit the entire population, it is easy to mistakenly believe that the State treats everyone equally, when in reality the indigenous population is at an enormous disadvantage.

41. In the area of education, curricula and teaching methods are often culturally inappropriate and indigenous girls and boys have no knowledge of the language of instruction. This leads to educational exclusion and hinders progress. According to research carried out by UNICEF, "it normally takes non-native speakers until the third grade before they can begin to truly understand what they are being taught on a relatively equal basis with their native speaking peers".

42. Regarding legislation in the area of education, Honduras has adopted certain rules and regulations to promote and protect access to universal education for indigenous and Afro-descendant populations. However, despite these efforts, the goals of the State initiatives have not been achieved.

43. As for Government health sector expenditure, in 2010 this accounted for 6.25 per cent of GDP in Honduras. The ratio of medical coverage was 870 inhabitants per doctor. With regard to causes of death among the indigenous and Afro-descendant child population of Honduras in 2011, health centres list preventable and treatable diseases which include pneumonia, parasitic conditions and malnutrition. In addition, the chronic malnutrition rate among children under five years of age was 11 per cent in 2010. About 66.1 per cent of Hondurans do not have adequate basic sanitation.

44. There are no health policies with mechanisms to prevent the main causes of mortality in the regions where indigenous children and youth live (malaria in coastal tropical forests and other low-lying areas and HIV/AIDS in areas visited by tourists). Also, the decline in the use of traditional medicine, which in the past met local needs for medical care, has worsened the situation of health coverage in their communities.

45. In recent years, public education has been assigned an average of 5.4 per cent of GDP. As for national coverage in education, 43.5 per cent of adolescents in

Honduras attended school in 2011, which is a gross violation of the right to education. Of these, 34.3 per cent were indigenous and Afro-descendant youth (aged between 13 and 17 years). The rates for educational access in Honduras among the urban and rural populations were 38.4 per cent and 11.4 per cent respectively, also in 2011. Of those, 89.4 per cent were children and 24 per cent were adolescents.

46. On the subject of child labour in Honduras, out of the total of 2,860,792 children between the ages of 5 and 18, 14 per cent were working in 2007 (only working or working and studying): 74 per cent were male and 26 per cent were female, with most child labour taking place in rural areas. The total of 400,069 working minors included 70 per cent in rural areas and the remaining 30 per cent in urban areas.

47. With regard to legislation, Honduras has ratified various treaties and conventions that protect the individual rights of indigenous children and adolescents: the conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and has supported, inter alia, the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. However, those instruments have yet to be applied effectively and indigenous children and youth are still at a disadvantage compared to the rest of the population. In other words, without the political will to back application of the full range of international instruments or domestic legislation, in the form of adequately financed policies and programmes, the adoption of legislation in itself does not change the living conditions of this population.

48. According to the indicators analysed, indigenous and Afro-descendant children and youth (adolescents) are in the main the ones who suffer the worst levels of poverty in Honduras, owing to disadvantages in access to education and health care and the need to join the economically active population at a very early age. The existence of a legal framework to protect their rights is meaningless for a population that may even be unaware of all those instruments, and is even less likely to demand respect for those rights.

VI. The situation of indigenous children and adolescents in Nicaragua

49. The present report on Nicaragua is intended to portray the situation of the country in terms of demographics, the economy, citizen security and food and nutrition security, as well as health care, education and the labour market, with a view to guaranteeing the rights of indigenous children and youth, and thereby evaluating the situation of Nicaragua and Mesoamerica in general with regard to the aforementioned subjects.

50. The limited availability of data and statistical information on the above topics has greatly hampered the compilation of the documentary information in the present report. Much information has nevertheless been gathered, in particular on economic and social issues.

51. The majority of the Nicaraguan population lives near the Pacific coast, the area where most industries and services are found; the north is mostly agricultural and indigenous peoples are found mainly along the Atlantic coast, where the autonomous regions are located. According to the National Development Information Institute, the estimated population in 2012 was 6,071,045. Nicaragua

has the youngest population in Latin America: 37 per cent of Nicaraguans are under 14 years of age and 53 per cent of the population is under 18. The average age of Nicaraguans is 22.9 years. It is important to note that the indigenous population of Nicaragua is a minority accounting for 14 per cent of the total population. The population distribution by area of residence shows that 56 per cent of the people live in urban areas and 44 per cent in rural areas.

52. The GDP of Nicaragua was $6.551 billion in 2010. The GDP per capita in the same year was 1,127 dollars. GDP grew 4.5 per cent in 2010 compared to 2009. The year-on-year inflation rate was 9.2 per cent compared to 2009.

53. Despite economic growth in recent years, poverty affects 48.3 per cent of the population, of which 17.3 per cent lives in extreme poverty. Rural poverty is more widespread and severe than urban poverty. Poverty affects 30.9 per cent of the urban and 70.3 per cent of the rural population, while the level of extreme poverty is 6.7 per cent in urban and 30.5 per cent in rural areas.

54. Work in the field of citizen security is focused on three main areas, namely, organized crime, drug trafficking and gangs, but also on corruption and a lack of transparency in institutions. Other factors closely linked to security issues are increased migration, youth unemployment, a lack of access to education, poor housing, violence against children and domestic violence.

55. The Supreme Court of Justice has stated that citizen security is one of its greatest concerns, since it is not only a matter of the population's perception but also of foreign investor confidence in Nicaragua.

56. No information is available on direct allocations for health care, education, nutrition and other areas affecting indigenous children and adolescents in the national budget, apart from general allocations targeted at the entire population, despite decentralization and the existence and recognition of the autonomous regions.

57. Although there have been significant improvements in food and nutrition security, 22 per cent of the population still suffers from chronic malnutrition. The efforts of the Government of Nicaragua include the Zero Hunger programme and the Food and Nutritional Security and Sovereignty Act. However, there are still serious shortcomings with regard to the right to food.

58. Total public expenditure on education increased from 3.1 per cent of GDP in 1994 to 5.0 per cent in 2007. This improvement is not reflected in ethnic communities, in which one of the main problems is illiteracy, given that 30 per cent of the population cannot read or write. This situation creates serious difficulties for these groups in accessing employment opportunities and leads to unemployment, underemployment (employment in the informal sector), low earnings and limited social security coverage.

59. The illiteracy rate in Nicaragua is 7.5 per cent (among persons aged 15 years and over). The net enrolment rate is 91.8 per cent at the primary level and 45.2 per cent at the secondary level, whereas at the intermediate level it is 18.0 per cent. The net school enrolment rate has remained at 46 per cent, while the school retention rate is 90.9 per cent. In addition, the repetition rate at the primary level is close to 11.0 per cent, while at the secondary level it is 7.9 per cent. The Miskito and mixed-race groups of the Caribbean coast and the Chorotega-Nahua-Mange people total 238,000 inhabitants, representing 65 per cent of the total indigenous population.

Among these peoples, illiteracy ranges from 28.7 per cent in the case of the Miskito to 37.6 per cent for the mixed-race inhabitants of the Caribbean coast. The community with the lowest illiteracy rate is the Creole community, with 8.1 per cent, but it makes up only 4.9 per cent of the total indigenous population. Indigenous peoples have benefited the least from educational opportunities owing to problems of coverage due to geographical isolation, the prevalence of low living standards and extreme poverty, which hinder their integration into the education system.

60. Although spending on health care amounted to about 4.2 per cent of GDP in 2010 and shows signs of increasing, the indigenous peoples of the north, the centre and the Pacific coast of Nicaragua (Chorotega, Xiu and Nahoas) report a large number of sick people in their communities. In general, in Nicaragua, the availability of drinking water and sanitation is very low, especially in rural areas and the thinly populated Atlantic autonomous regions.

61. The infant mortality rate is close to 21.5 per 1,000 live births, whereas the mortality rate for children under five is close to 26 per 1,000, and the maternal mortality rate is 100 per 100,000 births. There are 0.9 hospital beds per 1,000 inhabitants and a total of 3,779 doctors to meet the country's needs. Meanwhile, the proportion of births attended by trained personnel is only 74 per cent.

62. The Nicaraguan national sexually transmitted disease/HIV/AIDS programme began with the inclusion of AIDS in 1987, at the time the first case was reported in the country. Government sources report that, as at the end of June 2000, 559 people living with HIV had received treatment; of that number, 254 (45 per cent) had entered the AIDS stage, and 143 (53 per cent) were reported to have died. In Nicaragua there is a high prevalence rate: 11 out of every 100,000 inhabitants are living with the virus.

63. In Nicaragua, 7,000 street children reportedly use inhalants. A recent study at a market in Managua found that 1,300 children were using such substances. Drugs used by street children include not just glue but also crack, consumption of which is rising.

64. Employment for the indigenous peoples of Nicaragua is characterized by low incomes, unemployment and underemployment owing to their low level of education and vocational training and their forced entry into the labour market as dependent wage earners or small farmers. The social exclusion faced by the indigenous peoples of Nicaragua limits their chances of finding decent work, and should be considered in the specific context of the violation of the collective rights of indigenous peoples, especially land rights. In most cases, work for indigenous Nicaraguans means subsistence production, not a source of income or paid work.

65. According to ILO, 45 per cent of the population of the autonomous regions along the Caribbean coast is dependent on agricultural activities; 22.3 per cent earn their income in the service sector; 12.5 per cent and 11.7 per cent work in fisheries and commerce, respectively, and the remaining 8.5 per cent are classified as having other activities.

66. Nicaragua has a legal framework that protects the rights of children and adolescents and prohibits child labour. However, most children and adolescents work in the informal sector of the economy and are therefore prevented from attending school. According to a national child labour survey carried out by the Ministry of Labour in 2006, more than 265,881 children and adolescents aged from 15 to 17 were active workers, representing 13.4 per cent of the population in that category.

67. The Government of Nicaragua recognizes that one of the obstacles to guaranteeing the exercise of the rights of children and young people is that the indigenous population, as a minority, has historically been marginalized. Although training and awareness-raising efforts have been directed at the communities of the Atlantic region, their impact has been limited mainly because of language barriers and the low population density. However, these factors are not a valid excuse for failing to meet the needs of these populations, since this situation leads to violations of human rights by the authorities.

VII. Conclusions

68. The legal and political framework that underpins the relationship between indigenous peoples and the Mesoamerican States varies, since the constitutions of some States still do not recognize indigenous peoples, while others recognize the right to self-determination, including recognition of indigenous autonomous or self-government regimes. Similarly, everything indicates that governments are continuing to expand social coverage and have prioritized children in poverty reduction strategies. Nevertheless, there is no systematic data disaggregated by ethnicity, gender and age group that gives an account of the situation of indigenous children in the subregion.

69. However, most of the inhabitants of these countries are young people. In Guatemala,[2] for example, 52 per cent of the population is under 20 years of age, which is particularly evident in the Altiplano and Alta Verapaz departments, which have the largest indigenous populations. In Nicaragua, 37 per cent are under 14 years of age and 53 per cent of the population is under 18.

70. The lack of ethnically disaggregated information means that there is no quantitative data to confirm the gaps between indigenous children and the rest of the population that perpetuate the cumulative cycle of disadvantages and historic exclusion of their families and peoples.

71. The differences start from birth. In Mexico, the risk of dying during pregnancy or childbirth is three times higher in predominantly indigenous municipalities. When one looks at the number of estimated births, the risk of dying is twice as high for women living in predominantly indigenous areas (with an indigenous population of between 40 and 69 per cent) and four times higher for those in entirely indigenous areas (with an indigenous population greater than 70 per cent).

72. The data from the third census on the height and weight of Guatemalan children, disaggregated by mother tongue, indicate that 34.6 per cent of children whose mother tongue is Spanish suffer from stunting or chronic malnutrition, while the prevalence among children whose mother tongue is not Spanish is almost double at 62.5 per cent. Chortí, Akateco and Ixil children have the highest rates of stunting: 80.7 per cent, 79.1 per cent and 76.9 per cent respectively.

73. With regard to years of education, it has been shown that there is less access to higher levels of schooling in rural areas and, consequently, the percentage of indigenous students, particularly women students, declines. In addition, the

[2] National Survey on Living Conditions, National Statistical Institute, Guatemala, 2011.

curricula and teaching methods are often culturally inappropriate, and indigenous children do not speak the language of instruction.

74. The Mexican national budget reflects the inequalities in public spending on indigenous peoples. The 10 per cent with the lowest HDI receive only 5.7 per cent of total public expenditure, and receive only 6.7 per cent of Government transfers to indigenous peoples, while the 10 per cent of the indigenous population with the highest HDI receives 31.7 per cent. In 2010,[3] it was shown that indigenous peoples received 9.34 per cent of total federal Government spending, which means that the non-indigenous population was the recipient of 90.7 per cent of such expenditure. No information is available to allow this level of budgetary analysis for the other countries.

75. The economic model prevailing in the subregion creates additional problems that affect children. For example, in Guatemala there are 291,467 children between 10 and 15 years of age, mostly indigenous, who participate in the labour market. Two-thirds of them are engaged in agricultural work, and 26 per cent of them are girls, with an average salary that is barely 22 per cent of the minimum wage, and is even lower in trade and industry.

76. However, the most worrying statistics from the study are those that offer a new profile of indigenous children resulting from political, economic and sociodemographic factors and the prevailing insecurity in the subregion.

77. From a demographic perspective, some alarming factors and trends have been noted:

(a) Indigenous children are descendants of families that were forced in recent decades to migrate to urban centres during military conflicts or after expulsion from their ancestral lands because of mining, forestry, and fishing concessions. They have usually settled in poor urban areas;

(b) They are part of the temporary migration flows in the region, accompanying family members, and they usually work without receiving direct payment; or

(c) They migrate towards the United States of America or Costa Rica seeking to contribute to the household economy. In these cases, they face a series of dangers ranging from violence to loss of life on their journey to the United States, and they have no support or protection of their rights on their journey or in the destination country.

78. These children face situations of family disintegration. When they stay behind with their mother, grandparents or aunts and uncles, they are vulnerable to further discrimination and abuse of all kinds, and are at risk of violence. Languages, customs and clothing have changed completely, especially since television and cable have invaded their homes. When they migrate they risk losing their national and ethnic identity.

79. Mesoamerica is the most violent region in Latin America. While there have been reports of children being viciously murdered, it has also been shown that organized criminal groups and gangs are involving and using children and adolescents in various criminal activities, including contract killings. It has also

[3] Human Development Report on Indigenous Peoples in Mexico, UNDP, 2010.

emerged that drug traffickers use children and adolescents to sell drugs, often paying them in drugs instead of money, so that they become addicts at an early age and are kept tied to trafficking networks.

80. There has also been an increase in cases of trafficking of indigenous girls and adolescents, with traffickers taking advantage of the disintegration of society and the loss of family, community and traditional indigenous values. This problem has become acute in border areas.

81. Another factor that is affecting rural areas, both in southern Mexico and in Guatemala, is that the land has become less productive and the prices for maize, beans and other agricultural products do not cover the required investment and labour costs. As a result, poppy and marijuana crops have proliferated and, in some communities, drug processing laboratories have begun to appear. This, together with the trafficking, has meant that many indigenous and rural families, faced with poverty and limited productivity and job opportunities, see no other options and are drawn into these illegal activities.

82. Although no records are kept, there are reports of children and adolescents who have no opportunity for education or employment and are recruited by gangs, drug traffickers and organized criminal groups who offer them "a family" and relatively large amounts of money but with no concern for the risks involved.

Recommendations

83. Governments should generate statistics disaggregated by ethnicity and provide data sources that allow a more accurate assessment of whether indigenous children are actually benefiting from the expenditure earmarked for them.

84. Governments and United Nations system agencies, academic centres and other actors should incorporate the variables of ethnicity, age and gender in their official studies, in order to produce a tool with a comprehensive and accurate overview of human development indicators.

85. Poverty and inequality are structural problems, which means that the positive impacts of social policies might not be sufficient to reduce the disparities in access to more and better human development opportunities for indigenous children.

86. The economic model of extractivism and social exclusion, in addition to historical factors of colonization and discrimination, is creating new gaps between indigenous children and the rest of the population. The historical gaps have been aggravated by these new problems that require special attention.

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